

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, January 23, 2015

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE updates PARCC participation FAQs

Thank you for your comments and feedback during and following our webinar yesterday (Thursday) on PARCC participation. As the RIDE team noted in the webinar, we will use our 2015 PARCC results neither for school classifications, graduation decisions, nor student-growth scores. The 2015 PARCC results will set a baseline, and we will communicate the baseline information so that everyone feels comfortable going forward.

As we communicate about PARCC, we want to be sure that what we are saying at RIDE supports what you are doing at the local level. Administration of these new assessments has raised a number of questions, and by keeping the lines of communication open we can help ensure that the PARCC administration goes smoothly. All of us want an assessment that supports the

instructional process and provides us with useful information about student achievement and about school performance. Working together, we can attain that goal.

We continue to update our key message points and to add to our PARCC Frequently Asked Questions list as new inquiries come to RIDE. Here is the current version of our key message points and PARCC FAQs.

Key message points:

We expect all students to participate in state assessments, which are part of the process of education in Rhode Island public schools.

There is no formal procedure for parents to remove their children from participation in any school activities, including state assessments.

We encourage school leaders to meet personally with parents who express a concern about state assessments in order to communicate benefits, to correct misinformation, and to encourage participation.

We expect that students attending school during days of administration of state assessments, including make-up days, will participate in the assessment process.

Here is our list of current FAQs, including some questions and responses from yesterday's webinar:

Can we require students to participate in PARCC assessments?

Yes. School districts can have policies requiring participation. For example, school districts or schools can decide to use PARCC participation as one part of determining a student's grade in a course. At least for this school year, school districts and schools cannot use PARCC scores or achievement levels as components in determining a student's grade because these results will not be available during the current school year.

Can schools or school districts use PARCC as a graduation requirement?

No. Schools and school districts cannot use PARCC participation or PARCC results as a graduation requirement until the Class of 2017. Note that if your school or district has a policy requiring participation in statewide assessments as a graduation requirement, you can implement this policy for the Class of 2017, which is the current grade-10 class.

Must PARCC results appear on a student's high-school transcript?

Yes. State-assessment results will appear on high-school transcripts. We will not have scores or achievement levels available during the current school year. The earliest PARCC results on transcripts will be in 2017.

What happens to students who do not participate in PARCC assessments? Will they receive a score of "0"?

On our previous assessments, students who made no attempt to respond to questions were counted as

nonparticipants. We are in discussions with superintendents as to whether this will continue to be our practice or whether these students should count as participants with a score of zero (“0”).

Will nonparticipating students have any effect on school classifications?

As federal law sets forth, schools without a participation rate of 95 percent or better have failed to meet their annual assessment targets. In future years, a low participation rate could place a school in the classification of “Warning.” For 2015, however, RIDE will not move any school into the status of Warning, Focus, or Priority (our three lowest classifications).

What happens if proficiency rates go down because of PARCC?

PARCC is a new assessment this year, and we recognize that proficiency rates may be different under PARCC. We will not measure PARCC results against the results of our previous state assessments. The proficiency rates your child or your school achieves on PARCC will set a new baseline or starting point. Going forward, we can use these baselines to see whether our state as a whole, our schools, and our students are making progress.

Will PARCC affect my child’s grades?

This year, we will not have PARCC results during the current school year, so PARCC results will not affect your child’s grade in this school year. The scores and achievement levels

students attain on PARCC assessments this year (2015) will set a baseline or starting point that we will use to measure progress going forward.

In future years, schools and school districts may decide, if they so desire, to use PARCC results as a component in determining students' grades. For example, schools could choose to use PARCC results as an end-of-course assessment. The use of PARCC results is a decision that schools, districts, or school committees will make at the local level.

Will PARCC results affect teacher evaluations?

Yes, but not until 2017. The results for this school year will set a baseline. We base evaluations on growth and improvement, so PARCC assessments will not affect effect evaluations until we have three years of results – enough to measure improvement over time.

Will PARCC participation rates affect accreditation for a school?

We know of no connection between school classifications and accreditation.

Can PARCC participation rates or results affect college acceptance?

Colleges and universities participated in the design and development of the PARCC assessments, and postsecondary institutions may use PARCC results reviewing applications. We would not expect postsecondary institutions to use

PARCC results in decision-making this year. Further, we see no likelihood that the participation rate for a school would affect decisions colleges make about individual students.

Must all grade-11 students take PARCC assessments?

No. Grade-11 students will not take the PARCC literacy assessment. PARCC high-school mathematics assessments are course-based and students take these assessments only when enrolled in specific mathematics classes (algebra I and geometry), so not all grade-11 students will take PARCC mathematics assessments, either.

How can RIDE hold schools and districts accountable for nonparticipating students?

We do not have the authority to disregard federal requirements. If our participation rates are low in the state or in some districts, we will communicate that information to the U.S. Department of Education.

Can districts have policies in place that require students to participate in PARCC assessments?

Yes. If you have a policy in place and you follow that policy for all students, RIDE will back you up in your actions.

What if parents refuse in writing to have their children participate in PARCC assessments?

There is no recognized process, procedure, or form to refuse participation in a specific school activity.

Are the only options for parents refusing to participate to keep their children home from school?

RIDE has agreed to facilitate discussions with LEAs about the best approaches to take on this matter.

2. Statement issued on Tulsa School Superintendent search

As I'm sure you are aware, I am a candidate for the position of Superintendent of Schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma. On Tuesday, when the Tulsa School Board publicly announced that I am a finalist for this position, I released this statement:

I am enthusiastic about where we are with our efforts to improve Rhode Island's education system and am extremely confident in Governor Raimondo's leadership. I have enjoyed numerous conversations with the Governor and her team, and my relationship with the Board of Education is strong. At the same time, I was asked to enter the search for Tulsa Superintendent, and that was too exciting of an opportunity to forgo. Our team at the R.I. Department of Education is incredible, and our work on the new five-year strategic plan is exciting. So, I consider this new opportunity with mixed emotions. I will keep Rhode Islanders informed if there are any further developments regarding this potential career opportunity.

In particular, I value the good working relationship that we have established as we have worked closely together on many issues and initiatives over the past six years. It is, in part, my respect for the work you do every day that has led me to consider a position as a superintendent of schools. I am grateful for your support, and

I know that we have made tremendous progress toward preparing every Rhode Island student for success.

3. RIDE to release 2014 graduation rates next month

Because of scheduling issues, we have had to move back the date for release of the 2014 graduation and dropout rates, at the state, district, and high-school levels. We are expecting to release this information on either February 11 or February 12. I will keep you informed, and I appreciate your patience on this matter.

From RIDE

Meetings and workshops:

4. Registration opens for showcase on how Individual Learning Plans drive college, career readiness

School teams of principals, administrators, career-and-technical center directors, school counselors, school-based coordinators, and advisors are invited to [register online](#) for the “Individual Learning Plans Drive College and Career Readiness Showcase.” The showcase will take place on Wednesday, February 25, from 3 to 5:30 p.m., at the New England Institute of Technology, 1 New England Tech Boulevard, East Greenwich. This will be an exciting opportunity to hear from four Rhode Island school districts about their current best practices in implementing the Individual Learning Plan and in developing college- and career-readiness. Schools in these districts have created teams that engage in collaboration to implement a comprehensive Individual Learning Plan process.

Schools are encouraged to come as a team of administrators and faculty members who have responsibility for implementing their Individual Learning Plan process.

District and school representatives include presenting at the showcase are:

- Principals Arthur Lisi and Michael Hobin, Career and Technical Center Director Lori Ferguson, and School Counselor Lori LeBrun, from Coventry;
- Director of Guidance and former RISCA President Bill Pepin, from North Smithfield;
- Superintendent Patti DiCenso, from Pawtucket; and
- Principal Michael Zajac , School Counselor Kristin Albertella, and School-based Coordinator Linda Silva, from Scituate

[Registration](#) through eRIDE is open from Monday (January 26) through February 20. Seating is limited, so please register early. You may use either an existing eRIDE user account to log in, or you can create a workshop registration account by going [here](#). Once you have logged into eRIDE, search for “How ILPs Drive College and Career Readiness” to complete your registration. An email confirmation will be sent to your email address as soon as the registration is complete.

For additional information about this showcase, contact Diana Crowley, at Diana.Crowley@ride.ri.gov.

Certification:

5. RIDE seeks public comment on new tests for educator certification

ETS, the testing company that Rhode Island uses for educator certification, is adding new tests and phasing out older tests. There are currently four tests (Education of Young Children 5024, Elementary Education: Reading Language Arts Subtest 5002, Elementary Education: Mathematics Subtest 5003, and Family Consumer Science 5122) that have been regenerated and that affect Rhode Island. RIDE is seeking public comment from the education community and the general public on the proposed certification tests and passing scores for initial educator certification in Rhode Island. To provide comments on the proposed certification tests and passing scores, please visit:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Certification-Updates>.

If you have any questions about these tests, please feel free to contact Hilda Potrzeba, at hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov or 222-8891.

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. U.S. Department of Education highlights education themes in State of the Union Address

Please see this blog post from the U.S. Department of Education:

On Tuesday, President Obama delivered his sixth State of the Union address. The President's speech reflected his strong belief that education is a vital investment in America's economic competitiveness, in its communities, and in its people.

The President discussed America's economic recovery, noting that, since 2010, our nation has put more of its citizens back to work than Europe, Japan, and all advanced

economies combined. At a time when millions of Americans now work in jobs that didn't exist even 10 or 20 years ago, education—particularly higher education—is more important than ever before in the effort to equip our young people with the skills they'll need to succeed in the well-paying jobs of the 21st century knowledge economy.

In his speech, the President noted the significant educational progress that our nation's schools, teachers, and students have made – including young students earning math and reading scores at record levels, a high school graduation rate at an all-time high, and more Americans finishing college than ever before.

While celebrating progress, the President noted we must work to ensure that education lives up to its promise of bolstering and expanding the middle class and helping more young people to achieve their greatest potential.

To see the complete U.S. Department of Education blog post on the State of the Union Address, click [here](#).

From other organizations

7. COSEBOC seeks applications for 2015 school awards

Please see this message from the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color:

The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) is pleased to announce the launch of the process to select the 2015 COSEBOC School Award winners, preK-6 schools that are consistently successful in educating their boys of

color. Guidelines and the application for the 2015 COSEBOC School Awards are available at www.coseboc.org/school-awards.

Does your early learning or elementary school have a proven track record of successfully educating boys of color? Do you know of an early learning or elementary school whose boys of color have academic outcomes that rival statewide averages for all students? If either answer is yes, apply or encourage them to apply for a 2015 COSEBOC School Award. Help us reward, celebrate, and learn from these effective schools. Spread the word!

COSEBOC School Award-winning schools will receive a \$10,000 unrestricted grant and their promising practices will be featured at our next Gathering of Leaders, April 22-24, in Memphis, Tennessee.

Interested schools should review the guidelines and complete the application process by the deadline of **February 23**.

COSEBOC will host an informational webinar on Wednesday, (January 28) at 1 p.m. To participate in the webinar, please send an email by Tuesday (January 27) at 5 p.m. to SchoolAwards@coseboc.org indicating your interest. During the webinar, COSEBOC staff will review the guidelines and application process and answer all questions. You can submit questions prior to and/or during the webinar. All Q&A will be posted at <http://www.coseboc.org/guidelines-application>.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>